Report details state’s bridge maintenance problems

Connecticut ranks fourth nationally in spans over 50 years old; many are ‘structurally deficient’

The state and local level to not only repair and, in some cases, replace structurally deficient bridges, but also to ensure that as these bridges get older that they get the type of repairs and care that are needed to extend their service life and to help support the state’s economy," he said at a news conference at the Legislative Office Building on Thursday.

Moretti was joined at the news conference by Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.; state Rep. Tony Guerrera, D-Rocky Hill, co-chair of the General Assembly’s Transportation Committee; Don Shubert, president of the Connecticut Construction Industries Association; and Lyle Wray, executive director of the Capitol Region Council of Governments.

TRIP, based in Washington, "is sponsored by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers, businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction, labor unions, and organizations concerned with an efficient and safe surface transportation network that promotes economic development and quality of life," according to the organization’s website.

New London County
Thirty-two of the structurally deficient bridges are in New London County, which has 421 bridges overall, according to the report, which uses data from the state Department of Transportation.

The state DOT inspects bridges at least every two years, DOT spokesman Kevin Nursick said in a phone interview Thursday. Bridges are rated on a 0 to 9 scale. Those that are considered "structurally deficient" have received a rating of 4 or less — based on National...
Bridge Inspection Standards — on their deck, superstructure or substructure.

In the report, TRIP lists rankings by county of the "most heavily traveled structurally deficient bridges" and of the bridges with the "lowest individual score for either deck, substructure or superstructure." It includes both state- and municipality-maintained bridges.

In New London County, the most heavily traveled structurally deficient bridge is the one that carries I-95 over Route 161 in East Lyme, which was built in 1958. DOT plans to go out to bid in 2020 for a project to replace that span.

The northbound Gold Star Memorial Bridge, built in 1943, is the next most heavily traveled structurally deficient bridge in New London County. A construction project for that span is scheduled to go out to bid at the end of January 2019, according to DOT.

The list in New London County further includes such structures as the I-395 bridge over Route 97 and the Shetucket River in Norwich, and the Route 1 span over the Pawcatuck River in Stonington, among others.

Nursick confirmed that all of the New London County "structurally deficient" bridges that are maintained by the state and listed in the report are part of DOT's program to be rehabilitated or replaced, or are already under construction. When a bridge receives a rating of 4 or less, it triggers a DOT program to rehabilitate, reconstruct or replace that structure.

He said that over the course of a bridge's lifespan, DOT conducts routine maintenance and construction programs to keep up the structure's condition. But eventually, the bridge will need a more thorough response to address the natural deterioration and aging process. That's when DOT engages the rehabilitation, reconstruction or replacement of the bridge.

He said the designation of being "structurally deficient" is a normal benchmark in a bridge's lifespan, which is monitored, and is not necessarily a safety issue.

"The issue at hand is making sure we have the funding to maintain those necessary programs to address short-term and long-term rehabilitation and replacement of these structures," Nursick said.

He said 8.6 percent of DOT's 4,017 bridges were considered structurally deficient in 2012, with the percentage dropping to 5.2 percent in 2017.

During the news conference, Guerrera said it is important to pass the transportation "lockbox amendment on the ballot for the November election, while Blumenthal called for a bipartisan response on both the federal and state levels.

"The time for talk has gone," Blumenthal said. "The time for action was yesterday, and we have a responsibility to do it now."

Shubert said the more than 300 structurally deficient bridges in Connecticut are part of "a growing problem."

"It's only indicative of a small part of a growing problem with the thousands of bridges in Connecticut that are over 50 years old, that are over their design life, that are operating over capacity and are subjected to all sorts of de-icing chemicals every winter, so there's a bigger problem brewing under today's report," he said.

Connecticut's transportation network has faced an under-investment in infrastructure over the past 50 years, and many structures in the state were built in the '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s and have a 50-year design life, Wray said.

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Top 10 most heavily traveled 'structurally deficient' bridges in the county

According to the report, in New London County, the most heavily traveled "structurally deficient" bridges are as follows:

1. I-95 over Route 161 in East Lyme
2. Gold Star Bridge northbound in New London
3. I-395 over Route 97 and Shetucket River in Norwich
4. Route 1 over Pawcatuck River in Stonington
5. I-395 over Route 85 in Waterford
6. Route 349 northbound over Amtrak in Groton
7. Route 349 southbound over Amtrak in Groton
8. Route 2 eastbound over Route 85 in Colchester
9. New London Turnpike over Trading Cove Brook in Montville (town-owned)
10. Route 138 over I-395 in Griswold